

Preface

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The American Political Science Association's (APSA's) newly created Institute for Civically Engaged Research (ICER) seeks to broaden and deepen the ways that political scientists learn about and contribute to political life. ICER was created by the APSA Task Force on New Partnerships and its Civic Engagement Subcommittee and inspired by often less-visible work by many scholars in the discipline. It originated from the conviction that political scientists could and should strengthen the quality and impact of their research, teaching, and service by working more extensively with one another and with the communities that compose the broader political world. The first cohort of ICER participants proposed and then organized this symposium. This preface, written by the people most involved in creating ICER, describes its origins and purposes.

ICER advances civically engaged research (CER) that informs the public, addresses community-grounded concerns, contributes to civic problem solving, and models reciprocal and respectful engagement with various communities and groups. Fully recognizing the value of scholarship on civic engagement and the teaching that fosters it, ICER focuses instead on how to do research *through* civic engagement. Beginning in its 2019 inaugural year, ICER has provided training in the objectives, methods, and issues involved in CER—research in which scholars collaborate with those they study in designing, implementing, and evaluating research on civic problems and concerns. By helping to develop a “critical mass” of civically engaged scholars, crafting opportunities and support for these scholars, and pushing to elevate and encourage greater professional recognition of CER, ICER provides the institutionalized site for strengthening the discipline's CER traditions. We expect CER to take its place among other recognized and valued political science research methods, contributing to broader CER traditions within the social sciences and beyond.

WHAT LED TO THE INITIAL CREATION OF THE TASK FORCE ON NEW PARTNERSHIPS?

The creation of ICER emerged from discussions soon after Rogers Smith was nominated to become APSA's President-Elect in 2017–2018. Smith explored what previous presidents had done and found two basic models. The first, stemming from Theda Skocpol's Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy in 2004, brought together scholars to prepare research reports on major political issues.¹ The second model, stemming

from Dianne Pinderhughes's 2011 Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century, asked scholars to recommend ways to strengthen the political science profession itself.²

Smith adopted the second model. A participant in the Perestroika movement of the early 2000s, he had long been concerned that contemporary political science focused too much on refining techniques rather than on illuminating major political problems (Smith 2005). Those concerns were reinforced by politicians' subsequent threats to cut funding for political science research. Smith's administrative experience at the University of Pennsylvania raised apprehensions that higher education as a whole faced mounting questions about its public contributions. Smith also shared Jennifer Hochschild's concern, expressed during her APSA presidency, that the association needed to do more to advance the distinctive mission and challenges of the great majority of political scientists who work in financially challenged public institutions and in both public and private teaching institutions (Hochschild 2017). Of course, many scholars already place special emphasis on working with their communities in both research and teaching in ways that the task force sought to promote through both ICER and the creation of the APSA Distinguished Award for Civic and Community Engagement.

In consultation with APSA Council committee leaders and APSA staff, Smith appointed a task force to propose programmatic initiatives in the areas of political science research, teaching, and civic engagement. Recognizing the significant but limited capacities of APSA, Smith wanted the task force to find ways to develop various types of problem-solving partnerships: collaborations among political scientists and others, often outside of the academy, that could contribute more understanding of and sometimes solutions to social and political problems. With the aid of APSA staff, he began to recruit members to the Task Force on New Partnerships. Smith asked Robert Lieberman to assume the role of task force chair.

Smith and Lieberman placed a high priority on recruiting task force members who were diverse demographically, in the institutions they represented, and in their substantive areas of interest. Some participants brought special expertise in civic engagement, including Valeria Sinclair-Chapman, chair of the APSA Council's Public Engagement Committee; Hahrie Han and Amy Cabrera Rasmussen, both CER veterans; and Peter Levine, a former director of the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), which

has collaborated on research projects with youth and youth-serving organizations continuously since 2001. Other scholars brought specialized expertise in civic education, including Renée Van Vechten, chair of the Council's Teaching & Learning Policy Committee, and in the challenges of teaching institutions, including Cammy Shay, chair of the political

political science A pluralist discipline with a central focus on questions of power, politics, and governance.

Political science generally is relevant to civic life. Indeed, "civic" and "political" are terms with overlapping meanings, and the study of politics generally is meant to help people self-

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science department at Houston Community College.

Shortly before the task force convened, a newly created private foundation indicated its willingness to make a significant gift to APSA to support the work of the task force. Task force subcommittees planned ambitiously, proposing seven new APSA programmatic initiatives. Amanda Grigg, a new member of the APSA staff, provided support that proved crucial to the success of the task force. As a central aim, the task force and the civic engagement subcommittee quickly focused attention on promoting the value and visibility of civic engagement and CER. Its work initially was organized around a broad understanding of CER as "research that is done through significant immersion in, and ideally in respectful partnerships with social groups, organizations, and governmental bodies, in ways that both shape our research questions and our investigations of answers" (Smith 2020).

The task force developed and supported several related initiatives, including the new APSA Distinguished Award for Civic and Community Engagement (awarded for the first time in 2020); a program called Growing Democracy (in which APSA members convene community conversations among scholars, practitioners, and citizens on critical community issues); and the APSA-sponsored ICER.

THE POTENTIAL OF CER IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

In developing these initiatives, the task force used the following working definition of CER:

Civically engaged political science research is an approach to inquiry that involves political scientists collaborating in a mutually beneficial way with people and groups beyond the academy to co-produce, share, and apply knowledge related to power or politics, contributing to self-governance.

civically How people govern themselves. Engaged research teams are self-governing collaborative groups (composed of community organizations, government actors, social movements, and others); their research strengthens self-governance for others.

engaged Collaborative, in partnership, with benefits and substantive roles for both political scientists and nonacademics in the same projects.

research Any organized, rigorous production of knowledge, including empirical, interpretive, historical, conceptual, normative, and other forms of inquiry.

govern. That said, CER has a particularly direct and intentional relationship with actual processes of self-governance. It involves people who are working to organize and lead their own associations, movements, communities, and polities in research that strengthens their own capacity for understanding and shaping their contexts.

Thus defined, CER has several potential advantages for strengthening political science and benefiting society. First, political scientists who work closely with groups outside of the academy may gain early warning of social issues and insights they otherwise would miss. For example, Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa conducted research in partnership with grassroots groups in Minneapolis for several years before police officers killed George Floyd. Han's partners kept her informed in real time as the police force lost legitimacy in their neighborhoods and citizens' groups began to provide public safety in voluntary, decentralized ways. She combined their information with her conceptual frameworks to write a *New York Times* op-ed that brought attention to both her partners' grassroots work and fundamental questions for political science and political theory, such as whether social order requires policing. Han (2020) wrote, "It will take us years to understand exactly what has been and will happen in Minneapolis. The path to building a new system of public safety will be neither easy nor linear. But the experience of community defense over the past two weeks offers us a glimmer of the kinds of alternatives that are possible."

Research that is produced in civically engaged partnerships also is more likely to be used for practical purposes because it is more likely to address issues that matter to groups outside of the academy and because these partners can implement what they learn from research. Meanwhile, these partnerships can enhance the legitimacy of political science among people who otherwise would have good reasons to doubt its relevance or responsiveness to their concerns. In turn, grassroots groups can gain capacity for using research, data, and evaluation methods as a result of working with political scientists. Engaged political science thus connects to and supports citizen science, participatory action research, and other ways in which communities generate knowledge.

There is a heritage of CER in political science. As just one example, Elinor Ostrom, the 1996–1997 president of APSA and 2009 Nobel Laureate in Economics, participated in and inspired numerous CER projects. However, compared to other

disciplines, political science offers less support for CER. For example, in public health, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is taught widely at the graduate level. CBPR projects frequently are published in peer-reviewed public health journals, and the articles routinely document the engagement processes and partnerships as well as the research findings. The multi-million-dollar National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities Community-Based Participatory Research Program funds CBPR projects in health.³ Political science offers fewer relevant educational opportunities, fewer well-documented examples, and fewer venues for publishing about projects. Partly as a result, we observe a shortage of explicit discussions about what CER should mean specifically in political science. What, for example, is the relationship between politics and power, on one hand, and engaged research on the other?

THE EVOLUTION OF ICER

Early proposals for the summer ICER ranged from a series of short-term executive sessions to a lengthier gathering over three or four days. Committee members debated whether the focus of the institute should be influencing public policy, supporting and training junior scholars and graduate students, showcasing stellar work from seasoned researchers, and more. What emerged from these robust discussions was a commitment to develop a systematic, rigorous, and ethically grounded research-training workshop for political scientists at any stage in their academic career.

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When the ICER directors began the process of turning committee recommendations into a living, breathing institute with a curriculum, presenters, and participants, they did so with the recognition that many young scholars were already connecting their research to local civic actors in meaningful ways. They likewise recognized that some of the most impactful scholarship on voting rights, environmental and healthcare policy, and foreign affairs is informed by research that is civically engaged. The point, of course, is that ICER did not begin in a vacuum but rather aimed to build on best practices in political science and other disciplines, while also asking the who, what, how, and why questions that introduce norms, shared perspective, and credibility to this work.

To that end, one of ICER's goals is to broaden and deepen the ways that political scientists learn about and contribute to political life. Given the emphasis on objectivity and distance from the subjects of study that many of us are taught in graduate programs, how then are scholars to reconcile the requests they receive from local organizations or their own inclination to use their skills and resources to help others do work with real-life implications? We do not pretend to have all of the answers, but we suggest that

establishing norms of rigorous and ethical engagement is foundational to this enterprise. Political scientists are uniquely qualified to do research that addresses significant social challenges; historically, however, we have ceded this ground to disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. ICER considers the many ways that political science identifies and informs critical societal problems, particularly those related to citizens' obligations to influence government and to self-govern.

ICER aims to build a critical mass of political scientists, cohort by cohort, doing CER, presenting papers, publishing their work, and contributing to the exercise of democratic values. Over time, ICER participants will work with one another to further define the scope and visibility of CER in the discipline.

This is accomplished in several ways. First, ICER invites political scientists who want to begin doing CER to attend the summer institute where participants are introduced to basic CER norms, approaches, and expectations through discussions, cases, presentations, and interactions with governmental and organizational stakeholders. Second, ICER creates opportunities for collaborations between newer scholars and those already recognized for doing CER in the discipline. Third, ICER encourages reciprocal partnerships with and within communities, organizations, and agencies outside of the academy. Doing so may help policy makers and everyday citizens to see the relevance of political science in providing insight and understanding with real-world consequences. Fourth, ICER elevates CER as a valuable contributor to the

profession. Department heads, graduate directors, tenure and promotion committees, and more are encouraged to recognize the ways that rigorous and ethical CER pays dividends regarding the ways that political science departments are perceived locally and nationally.

THE INAUGURAL YEAR OF ICER

Plans for ICER were developed and implemented in an expedited but purposeful manner so that the launch could occur in the year that the task force was active. The task force civic engagement subcommittee work progressed from proposal to implementation in less than one year. The overall plan was drafted and approved by the APSA Council. Shortly thereafter, the applications process was opened and subcommittee and other task force members made admissions decisions. Several of the subcommittee members became ICER directors as the process unfolded: Amy Cabrera Rasmussen (California State University, Long Beach, who had served as subcommittee chair), Peter Levine (Tufts University), and Valeria Sinclair-Chapman (Purdue University). Amanda Grigg (APSA) provided extensive support, coordination, and insight. Ultimately, 17 participants were admitted and enrolled from a range of

career stages, institutions, research interests, geographical locations, and backgrounds.

In June 2019, the first ICER took place at Tufts University's Tisch College of Civic Life. Over four days, the participants learned from interacting with one another, the institute directors, and several visiting experts and scholars.

ICER content addresses challenges that confront civically engaged political scientists. Some of these challenges are conceptual and intellectual: What *is* engagement? What are competing conceptions of it? What would constitute an excellent CER project? Other challenges are ethical: How should political scientists relate to various external partners? How should power and responsibility be shared? How should they set priorities for research? What should they *not* study in an engaged way? Some of the challenges are highly pragmatic: How can political scientists achieve publications, jobs, grants, tenure, promotions, and influence using forms of engaged scholarship that do not necessarily maximize the pace of publication or the display of specialized academic methods?

Visitors including Alisa Zomer and Varja Lipovsek presented the model for engaged scholarship that was developed at MIT's GOV/LAB. Jarvis Hall (North Carolina Central University) discussed the interplay between scholarship and activism. Pearl Robinson (Tufts University) described her long-standing work with a network of Sufi women leaders in the Sahel. Jamila Michener (Cornell University) shared insights from translating engaged scholarship into more public-facing formats.

Participants also discussed practicalities of being an engaged researcher—exploring both opportunities and challenges—starting with Institutional Review Board processes and moving well beyond. Guests Celeste Montoya (University of Colorado) and Jennet Kirkpatrick (Arizona State University, and a task force member) separately discussed various ethical and methodological considerations, including one's positionality as a researcher and engaging with marginalized and/or at-risk communities. Lydia Edwards, a Boston City Councilor and former activist for domestic workers, discussed the value—and limitations—of academic work from her perspective. The group also considered the professional aspects of doing such work and established mechanisms to collaborate with one another as a cohort beyond the ICER. Visits with Robert Lieberman and Archon Fung (Harvard University) more broadly contextualized participants' engaged scholarship within the profession. Learning thus occurred through varied formats, including formal presentations, facilitated discussions of assigned readings, and case studies. The participants also had the opportunity to build

community and develop their own projects through small groups, individual writing, and informal discussions with many of the guests.

ICER participants were invited to continue their learning and engagement by attending the Frontiers of Democracy conference, which was held at Tisch College immediately after the summer ICER. The conference drew about 120 other scholars and activists from a dozen countries.

The first ICER was well received by participants, who have stayed in contact with one another both formally and informally. The cohort is building a true scholarly community that is poised to create a broader disciplinary shift. It also is a sign of the strength of the cohort model that the task force and ICER sought to develop. This growing network of scholars has been incredibly productive: at the time of this writing, they have established a writing-accountability group, worked on this and potentially other collective-research symposia, and been successful in their application for an APSA Special Projects Fund grant to support their cohort's collaborations and develop relationships with future ICER participants.

ICER was canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 public health crisis but revived in 2021 (online) and will return to an in-person format in 2022. As the task force and ICER leadership, we are bolstered by this symposium and we look forward to future iterations of ICER. In these ways, we will continue the advancement of CER in the discipline. ■

NOTES

1. See www.apsanet.org/portals/54/Files/Task%20Force%20Reports/taskforce-report.pdf.
2. See www.apsanet.org/portals/54/Files/Task%20Force%20Reports/TF_21st%20Century_AllPgs_webres90.pdf.
3. See the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities Community-Based Participatory Research Program (www.nimhd.nih.gov/programs/extramural/community-based-participatory.html). The budget allocation for CBPR grants was \$10,000,000 in FY 2016.

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